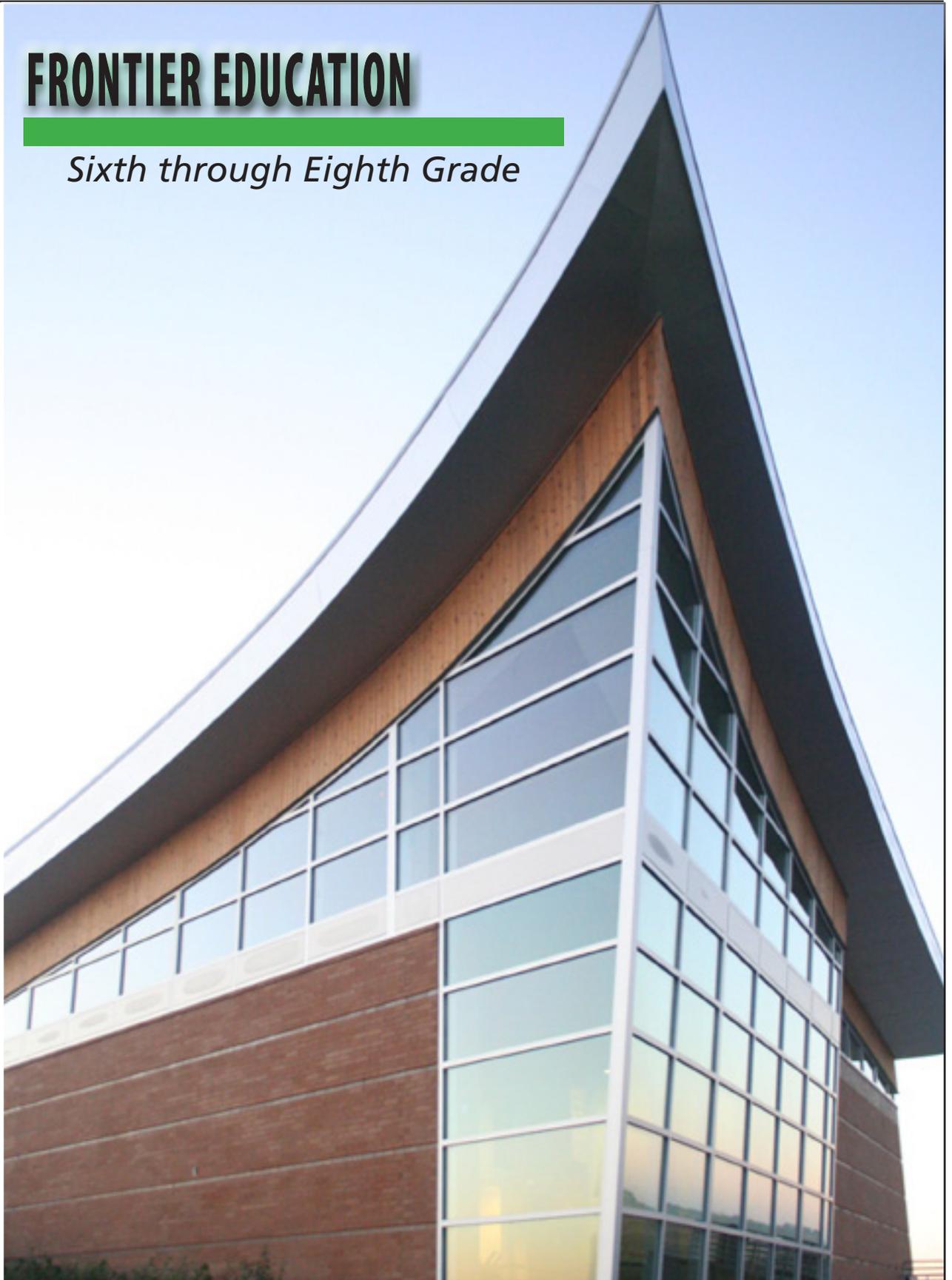


Free Land was the Cry!

FRONTIER EDUCATION

Sixth through Eighth Grade



Homestead

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Homestead National Monument
of America, Nebraska



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Coordinator

Tina Miller, Education Coordinator,
Homestead National Monument of America

Teacher Ranger Teachers

Craig Rafert, Social Studies Teacher in Sutton, NE
Ellen Janssen, Fourth Grade Teacher in Beatrice, NE

Layout Artist

Doris Martin, Seasonal Park Guide
Homestead National Monument of America

Primary Author

Doris Martin, Seasonal Park Guide
Homestead National Monument of America

Curriculum Interns

Sasha Denton, History major at Doane College
Andy Fuxa, Communications major at Nebraska Wesleyan University
Leah Goossen, Art major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Our thanks to the following people
for their contributions to our project:

Merrith Baughman, Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management,
Homestead National Monument of America
Mark Engler, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument of America
Stuart Hollman, proofreader
Tricia Parker, Reading/Writing Director, Nebraska Department of Education
Deb Romanek, Mathematics Director, Nebraska Department of Education
Vicki Scow, World Language Education, Nebraska Department of Education
Summer Stephens, Director of Curriculum and Assessment, Beatrice Public Schools
Larry Starr, Director of Social Studies, Nebraska Department of Education
Jim Woodland, Director of Science, Nebraska Department of Education



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Some of the ideas in this lesson may have been adapted from earlier, unacknowledged sources without our knowledge. If the reader believes this to be the case, please let us know, and appropriate corrections will be made. Thank you.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION



The Freeman School stands as a reminder of the role schoolhouses played on the prairie frontier. Officially known as School District 21, the Freeman School was a center for the education of children from 1872 until 1967. At that time, it was one of the oldest continuously operating schools in Nebraska. During its long history, the school served as a meeting place for the First Trinity Lutheran Church, a polling place for Blakely Township, and a gathering place for many organizations and clubs.

Homesteaders placed a high value on public education. Simple one-room schoolhouses were often built before their permanent homes.

Unlike many of the more typical wood or sod-walled schools found west of the Missouri River, the Freeman School was constructed of locally-baked brick. According to school records, Thomas Freeman, was paid \$100.15 “on account of brick.” Furnishings were usually handmade, but the Freeman

It seemed, as I recall it, a lonely little house of scholarship...But that humble little school had a dignity of a fixed and far off purpose...It was the outpost of civilization. It was the advance guard of the pioneer, driving the wilderness farther into the west. It was life preparing wistfully for the future.

James Rooney in 'Journey from Ignorant Ridge,' 1976

School was furnished with desks shipped from Indiana.

Teachers were young, often younger than their oldest students. Salaries were meager and many teachers collected a large portion of their wages in room and board. It was not uncommon for a teacher to rotate from

one prairie community to another to be housed and fed.

Books were precious. Many students had to supply their own texts. Family Bibles were often used. Different editions and often different titles added to the teacher's woes. When more money was available, McGuffey readers reduced this problem. In 1881, the Freeman School provided textbooks for its students, ten years before schools were required to by the Nebraska legislature.

The schoolhouse was often the focal point for a young community. Many homesteaders saw their children baptized in the schoolhouse, heard friends eulogized there, and shared a box supper with their neighbors at the Saturday night social.

CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES

- Students will analyze historical documents.
- Students will be able to identify the impact the media can have on how an event is remembered.
- Students will analyze the characteristics of a hero and heroine.
- Students will be able to differentiate between relevant and irrelevant information.
- Students will synthesize the role of population in determining government policy.

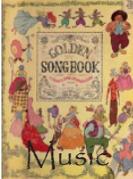
NATIONAL STANDARDS

NSS-USH.5-12.6 ERA 6: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDUSTRIAL UNITED STATES (1870-1900)

- Understands how the rise of corporations, heavy industry, and mechanized farming transformed the American people.
- Understands massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts, and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity.
- Understands the rise of the American labor movement and how political issues reflected social and economic changes.
- Understands Federal Indian policy and United States foreign policy after the Civil War.

NL-ENG.K-12.2 UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

- Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

SPECIAL ICONS		<i>Enrichment Activities</i>				
	Homestead Handout		Math	Did you know?	MUSIC	Language Arts
	Indicates a reproducible handout is included	Indicates advanced lessons	Indicates an additional math lesson	Indicates a little known fact about the subject	Indicates an additional music or art activity	Indicates an additional language arts lesson

Pre-Visit Activity #1 (suggested)



Blizzards are characterized by low temperatures (usually below 20 degrees fahrenheit) and accompanied by winds that are at least 35 mph or greater. There must also be sufficient falling and/or blowing snow in the air that will frequently reduce visibility to 1/4 mile or less for a duration of at least 3 hours.

A severe blizzard is considered to have temperatures near or below 10 degrees fahrenheit, winds exceeding 45 mph, and visibility reduced by snow to near zero.

www.weather.com/encyclopedia

THE CHILDREN'S BLIZZARD OF 1888



On Jan. 12, 1888, a sudden fierce blizzard slashed across the Midwest. The temperature fell to between 30 and 40 degrees below zero. A howling northwest wind swept the plains. The storm raged for 12 to 18 hours and is probably the most severe single blizzard to have hit the plains since settlement began after the passage of the Homestead Act of 1862.

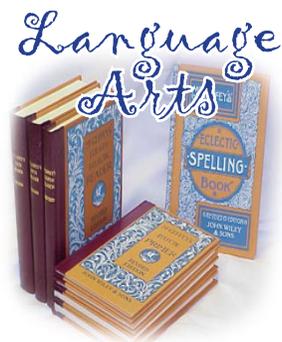
The storm had its greatest impact on children in portions of Nebraska and South Dakota. Therefore, it was later named the Children's Blizzard, the Schoolchildren's Blizzard or the Schoolhouse Blizzard due to the high proportion of children that died.

"Winds accompanying the storm whipped snow into the air, limiting visibility to near zero, which made even the shortest journey difficult at best. But the real killer in this storm was the frigid air advancing behind the low pressure system to replace the spring-like conditions that preceded the storm," according to Dr. Keith C. Heidorn, in an article on The Weather Doctor website.

As darkness fell, temperatures from Montana to Kansas plunged to double digits below zero. When the sun rose on the glittering windless morning of January 13, hundreds lay frozen to death on the open prairie -- many of them children.

Other Activities

Read *The Children's Blizzard* by David Laskin. "It is a fascinating account of the day the wind finally did what it always promises to do on those bleak Dakota prairies," according to a review in the Wall Street Journal.



THE CHILDREN'S BLIZZARD OF 1888

Pre-Visit Activity #1 (suggested)

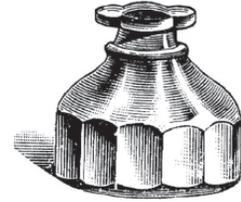
What happened to the weather?



Visit <http://bit.ly/d0y3IS> and answer the following questions.

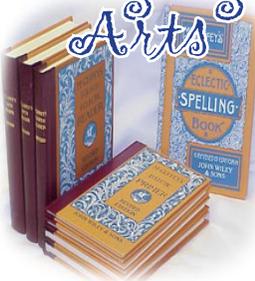
1. Why is it called The Children's Blizzard?
2. Where did the cold air mass sit the second week of January?
3. What organization provided weather services for the nation?
4. Where did a small storm system develop on January 5?
5. What direction did the cold air mass continue to slip?
6. To what did the author of the article liken the proximity of the two very different air masses?
7. What was the morning temperature in Denver, Colorado?
8. How many degrees warmer was North Platte, Nebraska than the previous day?
9. When did the storm cross into the Dakota Territory?
10. When did it reach eastern Nebraska?

Enrichment Activities



The biggest natural disaster of recent years is Hurricane Katrina, and there are some striking parallels between Katrina and The Children's Blizzard. Both affected large geographical areas; both were forecast well in advance but nonetheless caught residents unprepared; both provoked a huge response in the media. Do you think The Children's Blizzard was the Hurricane Katrina of its day? What, if anything, have we as a nation learned since 1888 about how to cope with natural disaster?

Language Arts



Write a short story about a blizzard or other weather event you remember. Try to include details about the temperature, the wind speed and snowfall/rain. Check the NOAA Central Library Data Imaging Project to get this information at: <http://lb.vg/gsh8B>

Other Activities

RANGER-LED EXPERIENCE



Welcome to Freeman School

As students enter the Freeman School they will each be given a laminated sign with a name (taken from the 1886 Freeman School roster) and an age on it. They will be asked to sit at a desk.

Welcome to Freeman School. We will begin today much like children 100 years ago did with Morning Exercises. We would have started with a song. So join me as we begin the day at Freeman School.

An opening song is sung. It begins “We meet again ‘mid festive joys...”

Now we will have our first recitation. Recitation was used a great deal in these one room school houses. Early textbooks even had examples of how to recite. Please join me as we recite this selection by Longfellow.

The poem “Roll Call” is recited. It begins “Corporal Green!” the orderly cried...”

How many of you could tell me all the presidents in order? Well, a student 100 years ago probably could because they would have recited this next poem each morning. Please join me.

RANGER-LED EXPERIENCE

The poem “The Presidents” is recited. It begins “George Washington first to the White House came,”

Next would have been a poem about America, another recitation about the value of hard work, and a song called “The Song of the Bee.” Then morning exercises would have ended with individual recitations by selected students.

As you can see, memorizing and reciting were essential in morning exercises. But reciting did not stop with morning exercises. Sometimes parents were invited on Friday afternoon to hear the students. These were often referred to as “speaking a piece.” Students could read an essay they had written or recite something they had memorized from a book. These were referred to as “readings.”

Students were encouraged to “get their verses by heart first and their meaning later.” Today schools stress the reverse. The student needs to understand it first and then memorize it.

And sometimes the teachers were not happy with the student’s selections. For example, “Had a little owl, stuck it in the wall, and that’s all.”

Or this one...

*“Had a little wooden gun
Shot a rabbit on the run,
Skinned him on the Sabbath day,
Oh what will my teacher say?”*

To celebrate the end of the year an event called an “exhibition” was often held. These would, of course, include recitations and might also include debates. One of the topics a school debated was “Resolved that Bachelors Should Support Old Maids.”

To close I would like to offer a challenge. How many of you can say the alphabet? Now keep your hand up if you can also say the alphabet backwards as quickly as you can say it forward?

A hundred years ago all of you would have been able to keep your hand up.

Let’s close by reciting it backwards.

Thank you for joining me as we turned back the clock and began the day at Freeman School.

Depending on time a spelling bee could be conducted or students could try some playground games.

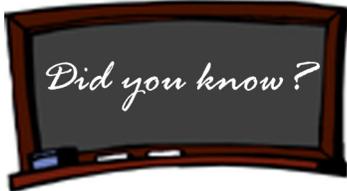
Source: Lessons from The Michigan Moderator, 1884-85



Homestead National Monument of America is proud to be a pioneer in distance learning technology.

Contact the Education Coordinator at (402) 223-3514 to schedule your virtual field trip on Frontier Education.

Post-Visit Activity #1 (suggested)



The afternoon of the storm, three of the Friesen children of Henderson, Nebraska walked to visit their older brother about a mile and a half away. When the blizzard struck, the trio headed home, but blinded by the driven snow, they quickly became disoriented and lost their way. They, like many others on the Plains that day, burrowed themselves into a haystack to get out of the frigid winds. When the children did not return home as scheduled, their parents Anna and Jacob became worried. First, Anna placed a lamp in the window, hoping they could see it and use it as a beacon home. Then Jacob ventured out to find his children. He used a barbed-wire fence as a guide as he pushed through the storm. The children heard him call their names, and they emerged from the hay. The foursome followed the barbed wire home, and all arrived safe and unharmed.

LOOKING BACK AT THE BLIZZARD



This mosaic was one of six commissioned in 1967 to celebrate Nebraska's Centennial. This one by Jeanne Reynal shows Minnie May Freeman and her students making their way to Freeman's boarding house during the Children's Blizzard of 1888.

Was Miss Minnie May Freeman a heroine?

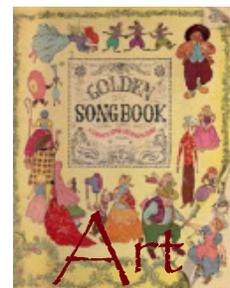
The following is taken from "In All Its Fury, the Great Blizzard of 1888". It was compiled by members of the Blizzard Club in 1947 and reprinted in paperback form in 1973 to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the blizzard.

"If many heroic deeds failed to receive proper recognition, there were others which were widely and loudly acclaimed. These stories

have become classics in the history of the Middle West and any account of the January 12, 1888, blizzard would be incomplete without a reference to some of them. Best known, perhaps, is the Minnie May Freeman incident. There are localities in Nebraska where that storm is still referred to by survivors as "the Minnie Freeman blizzard."

Other Activities

Make a mosaic about an important event in your state's history using aquarium rocks.



'...by ten o'clock everyone realized that the country was in the grip of a terrible blizzard, the wind blowing a gale and the snow coming in a blinding rush. By morning, nothing could be seen, and in order to care for the stock in the barns, it was necessary to draw a rope from house to barn. The cold was so intense that fires had to be kept going in the house day and night, and many people suffered from a lack of provisions and fuel. This continued for four days. Cattle on the range could not be cared for and it was not possible to search for them until after the fourth day of the storm. Losses were extremely heavy and searchers would find them frozen to death, some with their mouths frozen shut, some with their feet frozen.'

Ary Johnson, Pioneer Women, page 92

Miss Freeman was teaching in a rural school called "the Midvale school" in Mira Valley, near Ord, Valley county, Nebraska. There were sixteen pupils present that day, several of them being nearly as old as the teacher, who was still in her teens. The schoolhouse was made of sod, and there was enough coal on hand to keep the group warm if it were found advisable to remain all night in the building. Before time for dismissal in the afternoon, the wind broke the leather hinges of the door and blew it in. The boys repaired the hinges and put the door in place. When it was blown in again they nailed it shut.

Soon a sudden gust of wind caught the corner of the tarpaper-and-sod roof and ripped it off, leaving a large hole through which the snow began to drift. Both teacher and pupils knew that they must now prepare to

leave the building for it would be impossible to keep warm with that hole in the roof. They expected the whole roof to be torn off at any moment.

The sturdy, half-grown boys and girls were mostly Nebraska-born and were undismayed by the fury of the storm. They agreed to the teacher's plan to take the whole group to her boarding place, half a mile north of the schoolhouse, and assisted in getting the smaller pupils through a south window and in lining them up for their march against the storm. Cheeks and fingers were frosted and it was hard going, but they struggled on and eventually reached their destination safely.

Telling the story very simply, many years afterward, the teacher recalled how she and the housewife labored that evening to prepare a meal sufficient for the hungry crowd. This casual

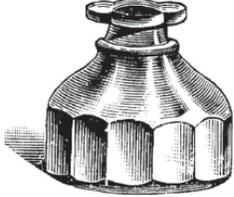
comment shows very plainly that the incident was not thought of in terms of heroism by either teacher, parents or pupils.

A few days after the storm the newspapers got the story of the trek and a highly colored version of it was broadcast across the country. Miss Freeman found herself a heroine, the recipient of many gifts and congratulatory notes from unknown admirers from East to West. She modestly insisted that no credit was due her for what she did, telling one reporter that she had no ambition to become a "second Grace Darling."

But the public continued to honor her for her prompt action in leading her pupils to a place of safety when their lives were endangered by the storm. Her story will be told as long as the blizzard of January 12, 1888, is remembered.

Post-Visit Activity #1 (suggested)

Enrichment Activities



Select another hero or heroine from our country's history, research the person and present a PowerPoint covering the following points to the class:

Who is the person?

What did they do to become a hero or heroine?

When did this happen?

Where did this happen?

Why do you think this person is considered a hero or heroine?

How did the media report on the incident?

What impact do you believe the media coverage had on our perception of this person as a hero or heroine?

LOOKING BACK AT THE BLIZZARD

"Minnie Freeman thus became a national hero," according to Dr. Keith C. Heidorn, in an article on The Weather Doctor website, "with her image rendered in wax throughout the nation. Reportedly, she received 80 proposals of marriage through the mail. Lyon & Healy, a Chicago music publisher, released a song about her deeds: "Song of the Great Blizzard 1888, Thirteen Were Saved or Nebraska's Fearless Maid." Many years later, one of those students Mrs. Ellis of St Paul, Nebraska, then 78 years old, penned a poem in tribute to Freeman's heroism:"

An Acrostic

'Midst driving winds and blinding snows,
Impending dangers round her close;
No shelter from the blast and sleet,
No earthly help to guide her feet.
In God alone she puts her trust,
Ever to guide the brave and just.

Fierce and loud the awful storm,
Racking now her slender form,
Eager to save the little band
Entrusted to her guiding hand.
Marshalled her host, see, forth she goes
And falters not while tempest blows;
Now God alone can help, she knows.

See them falling as they go;
Angry winds around them blow.
Is there none to hear their cry?
Now her strength will almost fail;
Tranquil, she braves the fearful gale.

Preëminent her name shall stand,
A beacon light o'er all the land,
Unrivalled on the page of time;
Let song and story swell the chime.

Write a poem similar to this one about heroism.

Other Activities

In *My Antonia* Willa Cather writes about prairie winters, "It was as if we were being punished for loving the loveliness of summer."

Write about a time you felt the weather was punishing you.



CHARACTER EDUCATION

RESPONSIBILITY

Students who are responsible are doing their part and taking care of themselves. They no longer rely on others to do things for them or give things to them. They are able to accept blame without making excuses. They are growing up.

5 Minute Focus

Most pioneer schools did not have specific grades. Children progressed through different levels of readers, spellers and arithmetic at their own pace. Students showed the teacher what they had learned through recitation rather than paper work.

- How would this affect you?
- Would it change your study habits?
- How could it make you more responsible?
- What subject would you do the best in?
- Is there a subject that you would struggle with?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Children's Blizzard by David Laskin; Harper Perennial, 2004

In All Its Fury Stories and Reminiscences collected and compiled by W.H. O'Gara, J & L Lee Books, 1988

My Antonia by Willa Cather: Mariner Books, 1913

Pioneer Women by Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, University of Oklahoma Press, 1998

What happened to the weather?

Name _____

Visit <http://www.islandnet.com/~see/weather/events/childrensblizzard.htm> and answer the following questions.

1. Why is it called The Children's Blizzard?
2. Where did the cold air mass sit the second week of January?
3. What organization provided weather services for the nation?
4. Where did a small storm system develop on January 5?
5. What direction did the cold air mass continue to slip?
6. What did the author of the article liken the proximity of the two very different air masses to?
7. What was the morning temperature in Denver, Colorado?
8. How many degrees warmer was North Platte, Nebraska than the previous day?
9. When did the storm cross into the Dakota Territory?
10. When did it reach eastern Nebraska?
11. How many minutes did it take for the temperature to fall 18 degrees in Crete, Nebraska, according to Signal Corps Private C.D. Burnley, an observer?
12. Using today's equation what was the windchill temperature in Dakota territory? How long does it take for frostbite to occur with this temperature?

13. State the three factors which caused the Blizzard to be so disastrous.

a.

b.

c.

14. Describe the actions of one of the teachers on January 12, 1888.

15. What descended on the region in the wake of the Children's Blizzard?

